

Promoting historical memory recovery through the feedback given by educational museums and laboratories

Promuovere il recupero della memoria storica attraverso il feedback proposto dai musei didattici e dai laboratori educativi

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Abstract

In the current educational context, everybody is paying greater attention to cultural heritage. Scholars are committed to continuously preserving this cultural heritage by raising awareness across students and citizens through a *pedagogy of heritage* oriented towards the recovery of historical memory. This article is a review over the utility of the functions of museums – considered as organizations aimed at the conservation and protection of cultural goods as well as the enhancement and conservation of educational heritage – in order to provide a feedback that can be useful across past and present times. To this end, this research recommends the implementation of educational Museums of School History as an innovative methodological model that can be useful to create knowledge, and therefore to narrate the origins of learning places: namely schools. Understandably, the final aim is the common good deployed to achieve a conscious use.

Keywords: heritage; cultural good; education.

Sintesi

Nell'attuale contesto formativo l'attenzione al patrimonio culturale sta crescendo sempre di più. Gli studiosi si impegnano costantemente a preservarlo sensibilizzando studenti e cittadini comuni attraverso una *pedagogia del patrimonio* orientata al recupero della memoria storica. Nell'articolo vengono esaminati l'utilità della funzione dei musei, come organizzazioni rivolte alla conservazione e alla tutela dei beni culturali, alla valorizzazione e conservazione del patrimonio scolastico ed educativo, quindi per creare un feedback utile tra passato e presente. Per un tale scopo in questa ricerca si propone, come modello metodologico innovativo la realizzazione di Musei didattici e di Storia della scuola, utili per poter realizzare conoscenze, quindi poter raccontare le origini dei luoghi di apprendimento: le scuole. Considerando tutto questo per un bene comune e per farne un uso consapevole.

Parole chiave: patrimonio; bene culturale; educazione.

1. Introduction

The cultural, historical and educational heritage of every Country represents a *common good* like air or water and, therefore, it needs to be enhanced by making it available to all citizens. The enhancement of this heritage has an unquestionable role in the education of citizens and it affects many fields of culture as well (Benito Lòpez, 2013). It also provides the possibility of creating opportunities to weigh and compare Italian experiences. In different parts of Italy, Universities, Schools and Municipalities house interesting Documentation Centers on History of educational institutions, school records, Laboratories, and educational Museums of School History.

School Museums, together with places dedicated to scientific collections, private collections and Archives of great interest, represent some possible communication forms (Meda, 2019). Therefore, the historical-educational heritage collects all goods that have been recovered over time, not only within formal educational contexts but also across private structures. All this material “aims at scientific research and production of knowledge” (Meda, 2019, p. 141), if properly included in an education path. It is a case of a category of *container* used to store materials, memories, images and anything likely to be forgotten over time if left in bookcases and drawers. Some laboratories conduct studies on youth issues and represent a kind of container of interesting instruments for all scholars, like ancient documents, drafts, papers, books, registers and many other things that could offer a match between past and present.

A good example of this type of laboratory was entitled *Documentation of evidence on intellectual, intangible and tangible culture cultivated in the South of Italy* held at the University of Bari. Other examples of memory containers are the so called *special rooms* of memory, to be specific the *archives*, together with museums and laboratories. These places were built to recover and enhance study materials, I refer to Italian School History materials, to studies on cultural goods and sustainable tourism (Baldriga, 2017). Feedback can be provided not only by those involved in such activities, like scholars and students, but also citizens interested in discovering the origins of school (Zucchini, 1991).

This idea of preserving, recovering and then making cultural goods available for those who wish so through the creation of these realities in Academies originated across the scientific communities in the 1990's, when much importance was given to collections of instruments kept in some schools (Meda, 2010). Therefore, safeguarding and preserving a good is an important educational gamble. Laboratories work closely with Schools and Universities so as to allow a direct study of documents and books, this way putting in place their educational action (De Bartolomeis, 1983).

1.1. To educate about the recognition of the importance of cultural goods

If a professional educator can propose a city as a classroom, what can an historian do with education? Environment and history provide some remarkable chances of knowledge, they have an instrumental to understand everything about cultural goods, therefore to identify, study, and find aesthetic enjoyment (Bertuglia, Infusino, & Stanghellini, 2004). The Museum container of cultural goods and objects from the past – is rich in information and bearing evocative evidence that can enable various behaviors to be gradually and increasingly rediscovered.

According to the scholar Gian Luigi Zucchini, the analysis of objects from past ages and the museum in its broader sense can encourage the study of important pedagogical issues stirring interest and sensibility (Frabboni & Zucchini, 1985). It is a matter of realities in

which it is always possible to discover news and make useful comparisons between past and present. When users become aware of past cultural assets, it will be possible to lay the foundations of a heritage that could be used as an instrument to resume continuity between past and future, thus regaining historical significance (Zucchini, 1990).

Some scholars have delivered their opinion on these aspects, sustaining that a Museum is actually born when the culture becomes aware of the past and the independent value of specific categories of objects (Bradburne, 2001). Therefore, museum can be considered as the product of every era that takes conscience of history, of present needs as well as the tensions of the future (Villani, 1979). In this regard, Husserl stated that “it is not enough to take conscience of that, every withdrawal of the past comes from an interest in the future” (Semerari, 1994, p. 50)

It is possible to say that it is an interest that can be recognized today because the museum ceases to be a place of conservation and becomes the place where we can keep objects and documents alive (Augé, 2008). Postmodernists argue that a museum is no longer simply seen as a building, but as a new process of knowledge and experience. The post-museum belongs to educators, museum specialists, scientists, students, artists, parents, becoming a connection with science, not limited to a single destination (Dewey, 1938). Therefore, the post-museum offers a model for experiential learning, a direct encounter with phenomena rather than a single platform for public engagement with science and technology (Watermeyer, 2012).

We just found the meaning of it: to recover the sense of history and continuity of life, aiming to satisfy material and spiritual needs. The Museum can weld the past to the present and the future, like an only path with various aspects, however bearing the same meaning (Brunelli, 2018). Museums can offer innovative cultural approaches, creating a lifelong learning course. Lynn Yuen Tran, Peroti Gupta, and David Bader (2019) wrote on the need to redefine professional learning. In this regard, we can refer to international experiences, as in Dutch or British museums, where the demand for advanced learning is particularly diversified for adults.

These cultural venues have taken on the key role of promotion, social change and inclusion, foreseeing a tangible development of communities, so as to support progress and learning across the entire lifespan (Sani, 2013).

More in detail, in the Netherlands a project called Kolb was launched by the Dutch Association of Museums. This is a sort of consideration on the factors that can make an exhibition interesting for individuals with different knowledge and styles. Considering the features of the each one's style, there has been an interpretation of the contents, the information, the attitudes, the atmosphere and the design around it, leading to rather unique setups of exhibitions (Sani, 2013). On the whole, educators accepted this knowledge enhancement, while some designers have experienced the theory of learning styles as a limitation imposed on their creativity. Finally, curators preferred to stick to their learning style in particular, the style of dreamers or thinkers.

All features are illustrated in the array of educational programs aimed at adults across European museums, which include qualified courses, laboratory activities, guided tours, debates, conferences or family events. In recent years, museums have been actively engaged in digital social networks and social media platforms. Therefore, international museums are appointed to “catalog, protect, enhance and spread knowledge, procedures, ritual events and languages” in order to arouse curiosity and start further analysis (Belvedere & Cenderella, 2012, pp. 27-28).

At this point, it is evident that Museums, Archives, Libraries and Laboratories constitute a crossroads of knowledge, encouraging the mixture of different languages and experiences, thereby connecting further educational opportunities and new interdisciplinary areas. The purpose is to create a network of information and keep it innovative. The museum's mission is changing through a conscious and reconfirmed connection with its visitors (Hein, 1998). In Museums' laboratories, it is possible to carry out some activities in order to entertain the audience that is made not only by students and insiders, but also by curious visitors. This way, in almost all cases it is easier to open doors to memory by enforcing those processes leading to a review of transposed images and by converting different visual and tactile evidence into something that can be preserved, saving memory from the oblivion of indifference (Tran, Gupta, & Bader, 2019).

2. Some proposals for historical Heritage recovery

The change in educational paradigms in the transition from industrial to post-industrial era, created a significant impact on the development of the museum institution across the surrounding society, seen as a new educational paradigm. Its most evident signs concern the dynamic participation of museums in the implementation of a lifelong learning concept, as already mentioned. By the end of the Eighties, these ideas were considered to be essential for a museum's development (Bown, 1987). Since then, the new educational paradigm has become a cultural one, in opposition to the industrial society's focus on the acquisition of scientific knowledge.

The discourse is about museum pedagogy, "a scientific discipline that examines education, the facets of museum communication and scrupulously offers cultural and educational activities in the museum context" (Belvedere & Cenedella, 2012, p. 103). Within a museum, learning is crucial, and Laboratories are the means to achieve educational goals by engaging kids and adults in the very essence of exhibitions (ibidem). Laboratories' proposals are aimed at enhancing moments of socialization, so as to respond the school's didactic aim and to provide schools with educational services and didactic sessions able to heed requests made by an increasingly wide audience. Nowadays, there is the possibility of having cultural goods stored in new locations that could be considered as a section of something larger, like a Museum. It is a valuable resource that can no longer be under-utilized. Moreover, there are also techniques and new texts "in other words, virtual realities" (Álvarez Domínguez, 2016, pp. 21-22). Álvarez Domínguez states that museums evolve, as human society evolves, adding that a museum is conceived as a continuous and enduring educational process that requires the development of a passionate charge (ibidem). Eisner and Dobbs observed that museum educators live in "a world of action rather than meditation" (Dis Kristinsdóttir, 2017, pp. 10-11). Essentially, educational museums, as well as school-based museums and so on, are conceived as non-official institutions, with the commitment of becoming authentic centers of educational planning across the socio-cultural field (Álvarez Domínguez, 2016).

A Laboratory is conceived as a kind of museum's section, with the mandate to design a structured and organic didactic project aimed at processing knowledge and stimulating interests through a functional selection and pre-defined objectives. It is important to give a central stage to creative experiences for both interpretations and productions, in order to have people understand the texts and display goods with the purpose of provoking diverse effects. It is thus possible to present a document giving particular importance to it, for example the correspondence catalogued in the Archive inside the Laboratory.

We can start from the evidence: copies of projects, from the ones regarding the institution of the nursery school in different countries to questionnaires addressed to teachers. Then, librarian goods: publications, school textbooks and educational goods such as report cards, maps and books. This way, it is possible to create a small path letting documents and images talk and bring back to life particular periods of the Italian School History (Targhetta, 2010). All those who plan new Museums or restructure them, such as exhibition curators or museum directors, pay great attention to educational and historical heritage preservation. Protecting objects of the past means “to preserve ruins as fragments of a time, as they have been saved from the process of time. Conveying memories of remote events can turn into an obsession” (Jeudy, 2011, pp. 9-11). In order to enhance them and make them available to the public, educational sections can be implemented as receptacles of memories, halfway between a school and a museum (Zucchini, 1978). An important aspect of a museum is the requirement of some supplementary services conceived as reinforcement, like a library, a technical laboratory or a reading hall.

3. Activities to do in Laboratories that support Museums

Upon designing a museum space, there exists the hypothesis of what the public will perceive, what kind of reactions and behavior will exhibitions arouse, as well as collections and historic reproductions. Today, new museums are made following current trends, also referring to new cultures, however always leaving room for practical activities. It is worth mentioning the concept of the Laboratory and related activities that can be carried out. It would be possible to organize some thematic exhibitions that can be considered as activities to enjoy preserved material.

These activities can trigger the registration and elaboration of perceived images, turning evidence from a mere visual experience to an asset which is *well preserved in memory*. Both the quality of exposed objects and the collateral perceptual experience give importance to these operations and promote comprehension and a solid construction of the memory (Bodo, 2000). Dynamics created by the visit to the museum push people to a meticulous conservation of objects, with the aim of preserving them in the Archives intended as a sort of special rooms of memory. The result is a kind of “reservoir and garage space for individual human experience”(Jeudy, 2011, p. 26) that can preserve and save images, objects and documents. At this stage, it is not only a matter of preserving those objects, but to bring them back to life. “The Museum perfectly performs its function: the automatic reenactment of what has been” (Jeudy, 2011, p. 25), but as far as the cultural heritage defense is concerned, we need educational programs that could help to cooperate and interact with museum's operators when they assess the goods. Benedetto Vertecchi has spoken about the definition of a *standard* for an education in museology, because who works in educational contexts knows how important it is to create an ability to understand text types. To set a certain standard for education means to cooperate in a general project that changes the population's life conditions. In order to be citizens of a Country in a global dimension, besides having certain descriptive and personal data, everybody must have certain skills and the ability to express themselves through cultural activities (Nardi, 1999, pp. 93-95).

Therefore, the very canons of a museum are changed, as it is no longer a *treasure chest* of memory and a bastion of scientific protection and excellence, but also and above all a place of cognitive experience, social aggregation, civil growth and identity redefinition (Bodo & Demarie, 2003).

The museum goes beyond the idea of a “temple of memory” (ibidem) and gains a strong meaning as a resource to be protected, to be preserved and enhanced. It is worth emphasizing that Museums of the past, of the 19th century, had the objective of educating the masses, instructing them through the communication of messages and values. However, it performed a function, albeit through a different process with regard to today’s institutions. In more recent times, there was the urge to invest in the educational potential of museums, promoting its capacity of safeguarding the cultural heritage, so as to essentially serve society (Hopper Greenhill, 2000).

3.1. The goals set for the *Laboratory* (Documentation Laboratory of the testimonies of intellectual, spiritual and material culture in the Mezzogiorno)

Every Laboratory, in order to be considered as such, has to set primary goals to be achieved. As such, the above mentioned Laboratory set its goals in terms of educational and informative presentation of preserved materials, in addition to the collection and cataloguing of volumes and correspondence made by archivists.

For those who love the recovery and enhancement of the past, it is definitely interesting to include a proper placement of it through the creation of paths that can tell the history about the school of the past. Often, even the organization of laboratories is a necessary element to enhance small enterprises, such as private archives. In fact, these activities allow a museum to bring out its peculiarities and specificities, thus contributing to highlight the most significant riches of a place.

This research also focuses on an interdisciplinary theme, examining the promotion and enhancement of Cultural Heritage, in addition to the pedagogical-didactic aspect, which can be achieved in the informal area of a Museum. In this work, conceived to discover new forms of development and facilitation in approaching the cultural public heritage of a museum, we focus on a more practical aspect concerning research in places of study and cultural production (Hopper Greenhill, 2003). In the framework of most recent studies on this subject, the idea is to make preserved studies more usable, with the additional technique of dividing them into sections.

During the mentioned Laboratory, cataloguing made it possible to divide the study in two parts. On one side, studies like interviews, questionnaires and various analyses on teachers from different school levels. On the other side, studies on Italian School History, documents from compulsory school, various analysis and dissertation theses on historical-pedagogical themes in Southern Italian contexts. In the archival heritage section there are various collections of letters, pamphlets, correspondence, as well as the copies of projects for the institution of nursery schools in different Countries. Due to lack of space here, it is not possible to quote all the Laboratory’s sections. Lastly, the didactic goods section includes report cards, maps and books. Among some topics of interest, in some collections of papers there is important information about Teachers Association with data on university professors. Among others there is The Constitution of the Association of University Teachers. In the didactic section there are notebooks and notes written by Andrea Angiulli. Much importance is to be given to the study on mankind development theories between nature and culture, by Andrea Angiulli. Some material regarding philosophic topics on history evolution is included, focusing on ideas, morality in art and science, the theological revolution, pedagogy and psychology, ethics in education.

The School History should reconsider its “epistemological horizons, shifting its historiographic axis towards school’s material culture history, the industrial production of

didactic objects and – at the same time – towards didactic history and teaching practices. It is not a challenge that can be won by individuals but thanks to the effort of an entire, cohesive community determined to build a bridge to the future” (Meda, 2019, p. 140).

4. Conclusions

In the current scenario of economic crisis, involving the main Countries and provoked by unscrupulous behaviors and by a lack of respect for the rules, it is important to deeply deal with topics related to the cultural wealth of our Country starting from our city, town or village. By creating opportunities for cultural discussion it is possible to provide citizens with an opportunity for growth. A valuable museum should not only be aimed at the preservation, but it must also give visitors the chance to enjoy “qualified cultural opportunities in their whole lifetime”. In order to do so, it is important to develop apt strategies for communication and learning. The historical museum’s Laboratory is a place where documents are brought back to life, where it is also possible to conduct research and stir curiosity on earlier education (Baldassarre, 2009; Zucchini, 1979). Moreover, the historical memory permeates the construction processes of our individual and collective universe; memory deals with real-life histories and the applied arts through which the world has developed. In order to preserve these valuable memories, a number of activities have been carried out, and places of study have been established. Examples are the above-mentioned laboratory called Laboratory “Documentazione delle testimonianze di cultura intellettuale, spirituale e materiale diffusa nel Mezzogiorno”, at the University of Bari; the School Museum “Paolo e Ornella Ricca” at the University of Macerata; the Educational Museum “Mauro Laeng” at the Roma Tre University; “School and Popular Education Museum” at the University of Molise, and many others.

Lastly, the institution aimed at the communication and dissemination of news on Italian and foreign museums is the Italian Society for the Study of Historical-Educational Heritage (Sipse), whose president is Professor Anna Ascenzi at the University of Macerata. This Society was created thanks to the initiative of a group of Italian education historians who are dedicated to the study of historical-educational heritage, working in Universities that already include school, didactic and educational museums and/or archives, laboratories and documentation, and research centers active in this field (like the above-mentioned ones).

Thanks to this Association, there is the aim to enhance several realities – almost or totally unknown – by involving them into the preservation and re-evaluation of historical assets. This enhancement yields the opportunity to tell the school history and the history of education that it can be increasingly enriched by new ideas and new lectures through a better use of its sources (Cambi & Gattini, 2004).

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